



# Health in All Policies Task Force

## Healthy Food Procurement: Case Stories

November 2016





In conducting the research for the report *California State Government Food Procurement Policies and Practices*, the authors came across a number of examples of best practices from across the country. The following document includes food procurement case stories from Washington State, Delaware State, and New York City, Iowa State, and Santa Clara County (CA).<sup>1</sup> The programs and policies described here each represent a different approach toward developing and implementing healthy food procurement. These case stories highlight the variety of ways that city, county, and state governments are using a variety of food procurement policies to improve nutrition and meet other co-benefits.

## Washington State's Farm-to-Prison Program

In 2009, the Washington State Department of Corrections (WDOC) partnered with the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to conduct a pilot program to serve locally grown foods in two state prisons, the Monroe Correctional Facility in Snohomish County and the Stafford Creek Correctional Center in Grays Harbor County [1]. Many stakeholders, including the prison directors, supported the efforts of this program because it helps to fulfill State Executive Order 05-01, enacted in 2005, which established sustainability and efficiency goals for state operations [2]. The State hoped that this program would have positive effects on the local economy, farmers, fuel consumption, the environment, and community partnerships.

Prior to launching the program, WDOC and WSDA received approval from Washington's Department of Enterprise Services (DES). Enabled by the "best buy clause," which exempts WDOC from the lowest-bid contract provision of the State contract authority, WDOC's Farm-to-Prison procurement contracts are not required to meet the two-year State minimum.

During the implementation of the program WDOC and WSDA needed to address a number of financial concerns and challenges. These included concerns from the food industry about loss of revenue, and some government agency concerns that the program would cut into sales made through state food contracts. However, these concerns were later dismissed because local food purchasing for the program represents such a small proportion of the market. WDOC and WSDA also garnered support from correctional food managers, who were initially resistant to the idea of having to change their menus, but were interested in the opportunity to reduce the cost of meals by purchasing directly from farmers. There were initial efforts to match fair market values for produce as determined by the Seattle Terminal Market Value, but this was found to be too labor intensive. After consulting with wholesalers, retailers, and WSDA, they were able to agree upon a fixed seasonal price structure.

"Healthy Food Procurement: Case Stories" is part of a suite of healthy food procurement related materials developed by the Health in All Policies Task Force. The suite includes two other documents:

- "[California State Government Food Procurement Policies and Practices](#)" describes current California State food contracting pathways, provides information about how specific departments procure food, and describes challenges and opportunities within the state food system.
- More information about recent state and local laws, ordinances, guidelines, and other mandates from California and throughout the country, that aim to influence the food environment in specific settings is available in "[A Scan of State and Local Food Procurement Policies](#)."

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise cited within the text, the information presented is derived from key informant interviews.



After an evaluation of the program with the two pilot facilities, 12 additional State correctional facilities joined the “Farm-to-Prison Program.” Participating facilities can develop their own relationships with vendors, and are offered technical assistance from program staff.

Under WDOC’s Farm-to-Prison program, local farms sell directly to prisons and are encouraged to sell produce in a field-packed, unprocessed state, which reduces production costs. Originally, WDOC planned to take responsibility for cleaning, sorting, and processing the fresh products within their facilities. However, not all kitchen staff could provide the labor to sort and process field packed produce, and expected a higher quality, more finished product. In some cases facilities stated that they received too much waste or sub-standard produce, which was of particular concern because uniformity of product is important within the WDOC population, especially for items distributed individually (e.g., apples). To address these concerns WDOC changed their contract specifications to receive cleaner, already-grated products. In 2011, nearly \$70,000 was spent on procurement of local food. Participation in the WDOC Farm-to-Prison program is voluntary.

The most significant and continual challenge for Washington’s Farm-to-Prison program is connecting with local, mid-sized farmers. WDOC and WSDA originally envisioned that facilities would work solely with small local farmers, but this proved to be too expensive. They then expanded their focus to include mid-sized farms, but found there to be a limited number of mid-sized local farms that have the human resources and/or infrastructure to manage product distribution during harvest season. Some farmers experienced difficulties transporting their foods directly to the correctional facilities. Farmers who were able to deliver their foods to correctional facilities and the Correctional Industries, where it was re-packed and cleaned for consumption, have also had to work with WDOC to ensure that food safety criteria were being met [3]. WDOC has discussed a transportation mechanism to address this issue.

WDOC used this program as an opportunity to revamp their menus and serve healthier meals. All WDOC inmates receive three servings of fresh fruit or vegetables daily, providing a great opportunity for local partnerships. Since the end of the pilot program, procurement directly from local farms has tapered off, partly because the program requires dedicated staff time to facilitate the arrangements and planning and additional procurement steps required. However, some steady partnerships continue to endure and the Department remains open to new opportunities to purchase and utilize local farm produce to enhance the inmate meals. Currently, WDOC is also transitioning to more on-site gardens to meet continued demand for fresh produce [4].

### Key Outcomes from Washington State’s Farm-to-Prison Program

- Food managers had to adjust their menus to accommodate seasonal foods, as there is a lack of year round supply of many fruits and vegetables. However, troubleshooting among food managers has resulted in the use of seasonal vegetables as fresh cut, marinated vegetables – a best practice for mitigating the variability associated with the supply of mid-sized farms.
- By working directly with four mid-sized farmers and cutting out the middleman, correctional facilities were able to substantially reduce their costs. Washington normally spends \$3.90 per day on food for each of its 16,000 inmates. Since implementing the program, they benefit from an average cost savings of 15 to 20 percent on their expenditures for produce compared to what was previously spent when purchasing through contract vendor pricing. In addition, WDOC moved to an average seasonal price to address the severe price fluctuations associated with smaller, local farms.
- The program produced considerable benefits for inmates, including increased job opportunities through Correctional Industries and increased consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables.



## New York City Agency Food Standards

In 2008, former Mayor Michael Bloomberg issued an Executive Order (Number 122) which created the position of the Food Policy Coordinator and charged that Coordinator with working with the Commissioner of the New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to create “City Agency Food Standards” (the Standards). The goal was to elevate the healthfulness of all foods procured and served with City dollars by setting comprehensive, evidence-based nutrition standards. The Standards established nutrient-based criteria that would affect the approximately 250 million meals and snacks served by City agencies and social service providers under contract with the City. As a first step, Health Department staff reviewed leading health authority guidance and relevant published research on diet and nutrition. The Health Department then drafted requirements that would apply to programs serving New Yorkers of all ages, from toddlers to seniors, in an array of settings, such as daycares, homeless shelters, jails, schools, senior centers, and hospitals. Input from agency staff was solicited through a Food Procurement Workgroup (Workgroup) comprised of representatives from more than ten City agencies that purchased and/or served food or hired a contractor to provide food to clients.

The Standards, which were established in the fall of 2008 and updated periodically, are divided into four parts:

1. Standards for Purchased Food. This section provides information on food items purchased (e.g. low fat milk, fruit packed in unsweetened juice or water, sodium limits by product type).
2. Standards for Meals and Snacks Served. This section addresses overall nutrient requirements (e.g. calories, fat, saturated fat, sodium, fiber) for meals served, gives general requirements for healthy meals (e.g. no frying, minimum number of fruit and vegetable servings, require water availability) and provides standards for snacks and special occasions.
3. Agency and Population-Specific Standards and Exceptions. This section addresses specific populations (e.g. children) and agencies.
4. Sustainability Recommendations. This section provides recommendations to support a healthy and ecologically sustainable food system [5].

The Standards are aligned with or more stringent than other nutrition regulations and policies that may apply to City agencies (e.g. National School Lunch Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program), but are the only nutritional guidelines followed for some agency providers [6]. To help agencies implement the Standards, the Health Department hired three full-time registered dietitians dedicated to training agency staff, conducting menu reviews, and developing tools and resources such as an implementation guide for staff and posters for consumers. Health Department staff worked with the Mayor’s Office of Contract Services to include the Standards in city contracts for food or catering services as they came up for renewal. To ensure ongoing attention and relevance, the Executive Order that established the Standards required that the Food Policy Coordinator oversee agency compliance with the Standards, that the Health Department serve as a technical advisor, and for both parties to review and revise the Standards at least once every three years [7].

The successful implementation of the Standards showed that it is feasible to create nutrition standards for publicly procured and served food. These achievements demonstrate that the City’s buying power can be harnessed to promote health. Following the implementation of these Standards, NYC developed additional standards for beverage vending machines [8], food vending machines [9], meetings and events [10], and commissaries in correctional facilities [11]. Agencies’ healthier procurement practices have contributed to an increase in the availability of healthier options citywide as vendors have adapted their sourcing practices and manufacturers have reformulated products to meet the Standards [12].

### Key Outcomes from New York City Agency Food Standards

- The constituents served vary by agency, and the way that agencies purchase food may also vary. For example, some agencies have centralized purchasing while others allow individual programs to purchase and serve foods. Nutrition requirements can be developed that apply to a wide range of agencies that



serve diverse populations and have differing food infrastructures.

- The establishment of the Workgroup provided a platform for agencies to share information, challenges, and accomplishments. This was an important resource to support iterative development and implementation of standards that affected other aspects of the food environment, such as vending machines. The Workgroup meets bi-annually to discuss implementation progress, helping to foster relationship building and interagency collaboration.
- Technical assistance support to agencies and their community partners is essential, especially for those that lack staff with nutrition training.
- Agency compliance data is publically reported each year in NYC's Food Metrics Report, as is required by Local Law 52. The report includes data narrative descriptions for many food-related initiatives.

## Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation

Munch Better ran from 2010 to 2015, and was created to develop and implement procedures for improving healthy food access at state parks. The program began as a component of "Health Intervention in Delaware State Parks," an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funded 2-year pilot project [13].

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Division of Parks and Recreation (Parks & Recreation) operates and maintains 15 state parks and related preserves and greenways [14]. In 2010, to complement activities like hiking and biking, Parks & Recreation designed and implemented the "Munch Better" program, which required Delaware's state parks to sell healthy food and beverage items from vending machines as "part of its commitment to promote healthy lifestyles." Munch Better focused specifically on camp stores, concessions, and vending machines, as well as related marketing initiatives (e.g. banners, advertisements, nutrition education) [13].


Parks & Recreation partnered with Nemours Health and Prevention Services (NHPS), a children's health systems that invests in community-based prevention, to develop Munch Better's food and beverage guidelines over the course of approximately nine months. Nemours provides resources and support services to improve the health of children. In addition, Parks & Recreation partnered with the Delaware Health and Social Services Division of Public Health to offer healthy food and beverage choices in retail outlets where Parks & Recreation has direct purchasing authority. and monitored the program.

Parks & Recreation based Munch Better on healthy retail guidelines from Nemours' Healthy Concessions Guide [15] and [Healthy Vending Guide](#) [16]. These guidelines categorize food and beverages into "Go," "Slow," or "Whoa" categories based on items' nutrient density, a method used by NHPS [16]. "Go" foods are the healthiest options, including fruits, vegetables, one percent milk, and turkey burgers. "Slow foods" contain added sugar or fat, such as baked chips, and trail mix bars. "Whoa" foods are the highest in sugar and fat and have the least nutritional value of items offered, including candy, French fries, and sugary beverages. Through Munch Better, Parks & Recreation hoped to increase "Go" offerings, add some "Slow" options, and decrease "Whoa" foods and beverages, improving visitors' access to healthy food and beverages.

In 2010, the first year of Munch Better, Parks & Recreation targeted its food and beverage retail to be at least 75 percent "Go" or "Slow," with the remainder from the "Whoa" category. The most significant effect was the reduction in offerings from the "Whoa" category, replaced primarily by "Slow" food and beverages [13]. The updated food options met Nemours' recommended "Slow" and "Whoa" guidelines, but did not meet the goals for the "Go" category [13]. Although Munch Better did make healthier choices more available, the number of unhealthy choices was still slightly higher in all retail areas except vending [13]. Camp stores were most successful in limiting the selection of unhealthy candy and sugary drinks, thereby improving the price competitiveness of healthier foods and beverages [13].



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Along with the successes, there were a number of challenges to continuous implementation of Munch Better, including a need to train concessions staff on a yearly basis, which was exacerbated by high staff turnover, and the lack of a mandate requiring participation. Though Parks & Recreation continued the program 3 years past the pilot period, in 2015 they decided to contract with an outside vendor for the food concession operation.

### Key Outcomes from Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation

- Parks & Recreation built a positive partnership with its food vendor to procure foods that meet Munch Better's nutritional criteria and taste good, which is important for its primary consumer base of children.
- However, a continuing challenge is that the beverage industry owns its vending machines, and continues to offer sugary drinks in portion sizes larger than what Parks & Recreation desires.
- According to the Parks & Recreation Chief of Office of Business Services, Munch Better could have been more successful if it made more substantive changes to meet "Go" guidelines from the beginning, instead of the gradual transition into "Slow" items. The Office of Business Services also recommended that the nutritional value of foods and beverages should be incorporated into evaluations of programs like Munch Better, in addition to economic metrics.

### Iowa's "Healthy Vending Iowa" Program

Worksite vending policies can support employee health and wellness. Adapted from the Nutrition Environment Measurement Survey (NEMS) developed by the University of Pennsylvania to assess healthy choices at food outlets and restaurants, the Iowa Department of Public Health partnered with the Iowa State University Extension to develop the Nutrition Environment Measures Survey-Vending (NEMS-V)[17]. Trained project coordinators use the tool to assess the percentage of healthy options in vending machines by using a color-coded scale to generate a vending machine "report card."

- Green-coded foods provide a serving of a fruit, vegetable, low-fat dairy, or whole grain and meet dietary guidelines,
- Yellow-coded foods do not provide a serving of a fruit, vegetable, low-fat dairy, or whole grain but meet dietary guidelines, and
- Red-coded options do not meet dietary guidelines.

In 2012-13, the Iowa Department of Public Health utilized the NEMS-V tools to conduct an evaluation of "Healthy Vending Iowa", a vending machine intervention at 13 worksites. The goal of the evaluation was to determine the types of snacks available to employees, gain support for a requirement of a minimum of 30% healthy food or beverage options, and ultimately increase employee access to and purchasing of healthy foods and beverages from vending machines.

Healthy Vending Iowa focused on achieving environmental and behavioral changes. As part of the intervention, all 13 worksites were required to conduct product testing with employees, use employee incentives, adopt marketing strategies, and work with vendors to identify healthier options. Findings from a process evaluation showed that social media was a popular tool used to raise awareness of healthier food and beverage choices and incentives such as water bottles and cutting boards were used to encourage behavior change. Open communication and relationships with vendors and support from department leadership were key to the success of this intervention.

### Key Outcomes from Iowa's "Healthy Vending Iowa" Program

- Evidence from pre- and post- NEMS-V assessments revealed that all 13 worksites reported increased availability of healthy options in at least one vending machine.
- Many of the worksites reported an increased availability of healthy options in multiple vending machines.
- One worksite drafted and implemented a new healthy vending policy.
- As a result of the intervention, two worksites modified their vendor contracts to require 30% healthy food

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or beverage options in their vending machines [18].

## **Broad Healthy Food Policies in Santa Clara County, California<sup>2</sup>**

The County of Santa Clara is a leader in the field of promoting healthy living, and over the past ten years has passed a number of policies to promote healthy food and beverages, culminating in broad-reaching Nutrition Standards that were adopted in 2010 and are now routinely practiced and have been integrated into daily countywide business.

In 2005, the county Board of Supervisors adopted a Healthy Food and Beverage Vending Policy which required County-operated vending machines to offer 100% healthy food and drinks. Following this, in 2008 the county adopted Sugar Savvy, a healthy beverage policy, which prohibited county dollars to be used for purchase of sugar-sweetened beverages by County programs and/or contractors, including beverages served free of charge to individuals and groups participating in a County department or program (unless exempted by the Board policy). Additionally in 2008, the county passed a menu labeling ordinance, intended to help consumers make informed decisions at restaurants. It went into effect on September 1st and requires chain restaurants with 14 or more locations in California to prominently post the calorie and nutritional information of their menu items on their menu boards in plain view for the public. This was subsequently passed into law by the State of California and, in 2010, incorporated into the federal Affordable Care Act.

In 2010, Santa Clara became the first County in the nation to create an ordinance requiring restaurants in unincorporated Santa Clara County to meet minimum nutrition standards for food offered in kids' meals.

In 2010, under the direction of the County Board of Supervisors and leadership of the Office of the County Executive, Nutrition Standards were adopted to support healthy living by ensuring that food and beverages offered, purchased, or served at County facilities and provided by County departments are of maximum nutritional value. These Nutrition Standards were developed with input from national experts and in collaboration with the County's Nutrition Standards Committee comprised of representatives from the Office of the County Executive, County Counsel, Departments of Public Health, Facilities and Fleet, Corrections, Probation, Procurement, Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, and Social Services Agency. The standards apply to County meetings and events, food and beverage vending machines, cafeterias and cafes, and custodial populations, and serve as recommendations for county properties leased to or operated by private entities serving the public.

The standards have been promoted through an initial countywide staff training and ongoing training through the County Wellness Champions Network, inclusion at four county health fairs annually, and through written resources providing healthy meeting and event ideas that are posted on the county website. The Nutrition Standards requirements are also embedded in policies for county meetings, events, catering, and travel, and are included as boilerplate language in all applicable county procurement solicitations.

### **Key Outcomes from Broad Healthy Food Policies in Santa Clara County, California**

- Santa Clara County leaders and staff continue to proactively identify opportunities to work collaboratively to further promote and support healthy living.
- Individual county departments that purchase and serve food to custodial populations such as adult jails, juvenile custody, and the hospital maintain ongoing efforts to increase the health benefits of foods purchased, prepared, and served.

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<sup>2</sup> The section on Santa Clara County was developed by Karen Candito, CFSM, CCFP, Santa Clara County, Correctional Food Services Director.



## Common Themes

Comparing the five case studies reveals the following common themes:

- **Cost is not necessarily the primary barrier to change.** While there is the assumption that changes in the food environment are challenging due to food costs, an additional significant challenge is staff time. Changing food procurement practices requires a significant investment of time to generate staff buy-in, draft standards and guidelines, coordinate multiple agencies, and provide ongoing training post-implementation.
- **External funding is important.** In two of the five jurisdictions, there was already movement within respective agencies to begin planning for healthy eating programs, but external funding was instrumental to increasing staff capacity, contracting outside consultants, and providing ongoing technical assistance and training for staff.
- **Healthy and local food purchasing may not always go hand-in-hand.** While healthy food and local purchasing are inextricably linked, some partners may be more interested in one approach or the other. In addition, vendors may be better equipped for one or the other, and/or local political climates can influence whether it is easier to secure buy-in for public health goals or environmental sustainability goals. The case for considering both goals may need to be made over time, beginning with whichever is more politically feasible. New York City, due to its status as a major metropolis with a wide range of food distribution channels, can procure food that is both healthy for consumers and for a portion of foods, local. This may not initially be possible for all public agencies.





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